



# NEWS RELEASE

## National Bison Range



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CONTACT - Pat Jamieson, Outdoor Recreation Planner, (406) 644-2211, ext 207**

United States Department of the Interior ~ Fish and Wildlife Service

National Bison Range, 58355 Bison Range Road, Moiese, MT 59824

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### **National Bison Range Seeks Comments on Proposal to Increase Fees on Scenic Drives**

The National Bison Range is seeking comments on a proposal to increase fees for the scenic drives at the refuge. Fees are charged during the summer season (mid May to late October) for access to the Red Sleep Mountain Drive, the Prairie Drive and the West Loop. The proposal would increase the daily pass from \$4 to \$5 per passenger vehicle. The cost for a National Bison Range annual pass would increase from \$10 to \$15 for a year. The proposal would also increase fees for commercial tours. Motor coaches would increase from \$20 to \$25, commercial vans with more than 10 passengers would increase from \$10 to \$12, commercial vans with 5 to 10 passengers from \$8 to \$10 and an increase from \$4 to \$5 for commercial vans with less than 5 passengers. Increases would take affect May 1, 2007

This would be the first increase for Bison Range fees since fee collection started in 1995. Access to the Visitor Center, to the Day Use Area and Nature Trail and to fishing along Mission Creek and the Jocko River will still be offered free of charge. And fees will not be charged during the winter season when some scenic drives are closed due to hazardous road conditions.

Refuge fees cover part of the costs to maintain the law enforcement program, road maintenance and dust control, brochure printing, environmental education programs, and teacher workshops. The plan is available on our website, <http://bisonrange.fws.gov>, or by contacting the office for a copy at 406/644-2211. The Service invites your input, comments, and questions by February 15, 2007. For further information, please contact Pat Jamieson at the National Bison Range, 58355 Bison Range Road, Moiese, MT 59824 or email [pat\\_jamieson@fws.gov](mailto:pat_jamieson@fws.gov).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also

oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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## **INFORMATION AND BACKGROUND ON PROPOSED FEE INCREASE AT THE NATIONAL BISON RANGE FOR 2007**

**Refuge name and state:** National Bison Range, Moiese, MT

**Background:** Established in 1908, the National Bison Range lands were acquired to provide "...for a permanent national bison range for the herd of bison..." (35 Stat. 267-8, May 23, 1908). It also was mandated "...to provide adequate pasture for the display of bison in their natural habitat at a location readily available to the public..." (72 Stat. 561, August 12, 1958). The Refuge receives approximately 150,000 visitors a year. Visitors are offered year-round opportunities to fish, observe and photograph wildlife and to participate in environmental education and outreach programs. Besides excellent opportunities to view a variety of plants and wildlife along the scenic drives and walking trails, the Refuge provides a 2,000 square foot visitor center with interpretive displays and a new orientation video. A cooperative agreement with the Glacier Nature History Association provides a selection of books and other items for sale. A large environmental education program services over 2,800 students and teachers directly during field trips to the Range.

**Specific activity for which the fee is charged:** Fees are charged to visitors accessing the scenic drives (including Red Sleep Mountain Drive, the West Loop and the Prairie Drive) during the summer season (mid-May to late-October). Currently, these fees are \$4 per passenger vehicle per day. The Refuge also has available a \$10 Bison Range specific vehicle pass, good for a year from date of purchase. In addition, the Refuge charges separate fees for commercial groups (tours). The fee for a motor coach to access the scenic drive is \$20 for the day. Smaller tour vans fees range from \$10 for vans with capacity over 10 passengers, \$8 for vans carrying 5-10 passengers and \$4 for vans with 4 or less passengers. The Refuge sells and accepts the new America the Beautiful Passes, which will replace the Golden Passports. It also sells and accepts Federal Migratory Bird Stamps (Duck Stamps) for access to the scenic drives. The Bison Range will continue to accept the national Golden Passports (Golden Eagle, Golden Age, Golden Access), and upgraded National Park Passes.

The Refuge does not charge to access the Visitor Center, the Day Use Area, or fishing areas. In addition, no fees are charged during the "winter" season (late October to mid-May) for the scenic drives which remain open. Fees are waived for educational and youth groups.

**Justification for increasing the fee:** The National Bison Range has an annual visitation of 150,000. Fees at the National Bison Range have not increased since fee collection started in 1995.

The National Bison Range supports a very large public use program. Approximately 40% of the annual Refuge maintenance and operational budget support the public use program, including a full time Outdoor Recreation Planner and maintenance of the Visitor Center. During the summer season, two law enforcement personnel (LE) assist visitors, educate the public about rules and regulations, issue warnings and citations, protect resources and provide for public safety. We were able to establish the second seasonal LE position at the Bison Range by using proceeds from the fee collection.

Collected fees have also been used to address needs related to the visitor services program, including dust control on the scenic drives, printing brochures, environmental education programs, and teacher workshops.

**Comparison to fees charged elsewhere in area:** The increased fees at the National Bison Range will be comparable to fees charged at other venues in the area. Glacier National Park (located 85 miles north) currently charges \$25 per vehicle for a week's pass with an annual park-specific pass available for \$30.

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Conservation Permit currently sells for \$12-\$15 per year (depending on residency status). This allows access for recreational uses (other than fishing and hunting) on designated tribal lands.

The Ninepipe Museum of Early History (located near Ronan, MT about 18 miles from the Refuge) charges from \$2-\$4 per person per day. The People's Center charges \$2-\$3 per person and \$6 per family for access to their museum in Pablo, MT.

**Timeline and notification plan:** The Refuge hopes to install the new fees on May 1, 2007. Public comments on the proposal were requested during a 30-day period to end February 15, 2007.

If the proposed fee increase is approved, Refuge staff will notify the public of the fee increase through a number of press releases. We have posted information at the Refuge headquarters, kiosks and web site. There is a small handout given out at the Visitor Center to contact our many local and repeat visitors. Nearby chambers of commerce and Montana Travel (Montana Department of Commerce) will have the information. A number of travel publication authors contact the Refuge annually for updating and the fee increase will be prominent in the information provided to them.

**Estimate of annual collections with fee in place:** Raising the daily fee by one dollar (from \$4 to \$5, the annual Refuge pass by five dollars (from \$10 to \$15), the motor coach fee by five dollars (from \$20 to \$25), the 10+ passenger van fee by two dollars (from \$10 to \$12), the 5-10 passenger van fee by two dollars (from \$8 to \$10 dollars) and the under 5 passenger van fee by one dollar (from \$4 to \$5) could bring in an extra \$7,297 (based on FY2006 figures).

Fees for FY 2006 -

Daily Passes sold - 6,423 passes @ \$4 each = \$25,692

Annual Passes sold - 156 passes @ \$10 each = \$1,560

Motor coach Passes sold - 12 passes @ \$20 each = \$240

Van (10+ passenger) sold - 13 passes @ \$10 each = \$130

Van (5-10 passenger) sold - 4 passes @ \$8 each = \$32  
Van (less than 5 passengers) sold - 0 passes @ \$4 each = 0

Estimated Increase (based on numbers sold in FY2006)

Daily Passes – 6,423 passes @ \$1 increase = \$6,423  
Annual Passes - 156 passes @ \$5 increase = \$780  
Motor coach Passes sold - 12 passes @ \$5 increase = \$60  
Van (10+ passenger) sold - 13 passes @ \$2 increase = \$26  
Van (5-10 passenger) sold - 4 passes @ \$2 increase = \$8  
Van (less than 5 passengers) sold - 0 passes @ \$1 increase = 0

**TOTAL Increase - \$7,297**